

Sermon Great Vigil 2021 All Years

Prayer: In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Homily:

Tonight as we observe the Great Vigil,

I can't help but remember how weird and how tough
this year has been.

Now, maybe I can take a breath. And not worry.

Maybe humanity has beaten back the invisible monster
that stole my Mother, and three friends, back home,
and robbed so many of us.

Maybe it's not been a *Great Vigil*, but it's certainly been a *Hard* one.

The other day I read an interesting newspaper story about

a heated argument over a possible Old Testament forgery.ⁱ

People are still excited about that, a hundred years later.

And it turns out that forgeries are fairly common,

Even if they are usually easily discovered.ⁱⁱ

It is easy to be overconfident when one talks about God.

But I am confident of God's promised Kingdom,
Here already, even if not in its fullness.

We can have confidence in God's love. That's OK. *God is reliable!*

But in the dark hours after Jesus' horrific political murder,
his friends seem to have little or no confidence,
So they hid in the upper room.

Waiting for a knock on the door.

The Messiah was gone. Horribly dead, and buried.

They had no hope. They'd forgotten their Father's promises.

Tonight we have the fortune of looking forward to Jesus' return,

But for His Mother, and friends there was no such hope. ⁱⁱⁱ

It's important to remember them and their despair.

There but for the grace of God

The Vigil reminds us that life without Christ, is a cold tomb.

No hope of salvation and no sunrise to come.

We know that Jesus arose. We know that he will return.

We know that we are saved.

But that Saturday night no one – everyone thought they were toast.

The Gospels tell us that the Last Supper was a Passover meal.

Jesus and his friends remembered that their people,
who had once been slaves in Egypt,
were set free by the Lord's mighty hand.

Things went according to God's plan. But not Pharaoh's.

Best laid plans and all that.

We know that God is^{iv} God is all-powerful, all-knowing,
all-creative and all present. But, we aren't any of those things.
And yet God still asks us to take kinds of risks.

And we take those risks because we know,

as Jesus' disciples eventually knew,

That God loves us, and won't let us down.

Even in the darkest night.

Even when we aren't lovable, God still loves us.

The history of our salvation^v is astonishing.

God loves the wrong people, and we let Her down.

Again and again and again.

God doesn't fix our problems.

She usually gives us the tools we need.

But If we ruin our atmosphere for 500 years, that's on us.

If we don't get our bad habits ...greed, and selfishness and bias ...
under control, and we miss a chance

to cure cancer or beat the common cold because

the future lead scientist died in avoidable squalor,

while we insist on the latest gadget ...

That's on us.

God is with us. Emmanuel.

Always has been and always will be. We know that now.

2000 years, on this night, Jesus' friends weren't so confident.

The Lord lives. The Lord will come again. We *know* that.

How, then, shall we live?

That's on us.

- Amen

ⁱ In the New York Times, Sunday March 28, 2021.

ⁱⁱ But not always. See, various news stories on the Museum of the Bible, in Washington, DC, discovery that all 16 of its supposed Dead Sea Scroll fragments are forgeries. "After an exhaustive review of all the imaging and scientific analysis results, it is evident that none of the textual fragments in Museum of the Bible's Dead Sea Scroll collection are authentic," said the leader of the investigation, Colette Loll, the director of Art Fraud Insights, in a statement. "Moreover, each exhibits characteristics that suggest they are deliberate forgeries created in the twentieth century with the intent to mimic authentic Dead Sea Scroll fragments."

See also the 2012 story of the false "Gospel of Jesus' Wife," which deceived a Harvard scholar, in 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ Because Jesus died in the late afternoon there was no time to cleanse his body according to Jewish custom, and Saturday was the Sabbath, So it was on the first day of their week, Sunday, that they came to his tomb to ritually cleanse him.

^{iv} That is omnipotent, omniscient, omnifiscient and omnipresent.

^v On Salvation history, see the theological concept called *Heilsgeschichte* (*German*) which is the concept that God is personally and redemptively involved in human history.